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Executive Coaching

A Balanced Life: What Is It?

BY ELENE CAFASSO

Work/Life Balance. You hear about it everywhere: in magazine articles, TV reports, and now even entire books have been published on the subject. Everyone seems to want it, yet no one seems to have it! In fact, as a professional coach, most of my clients are over-stressed and over-busy people who want more balance in their life while still achieving their highest goals.

But exactly what does a balanced life mean to most people? As background for this article, I decided to take a very unscientific poll to find out! I asked family and friends to answer two "simple" questions:

1. How do you define balance in your life?
2. What does it look like when your life is balanced?

I invite you to answer these questions for yourself before reading on. Really give them some thought because they are truly powerful questions. Whatever you come up with is what's true for you. There is no "right" answer. In fact, the answers I received when I posed this question ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous! Here are a few of my favorites:

> "Balance in my life means that I'm not constipated. If I'm not constipated it means I actually have time to go to the bathroom! Which means I have five minutes all to myself!" —K.H.

Another friend, A. R., is so burned out that he doesn't even believe balance is possible any more:

> "Balance does not exist. My life is like being blindfolded on a roller coaster. The most I can hope for at any time is 10 solid minutes of peace and quiet before the next disaster strikes. An occasional beer or pizza wouldn't be too bad either." This poor guy definitely needs a coach!

For other, perhaps more optimistic folks, balance is actually quite simple:

> "I'm caught up with work and my desk is clean; I have healthy kids; I don't have to run around." –L.T. Or, from K.R.: "My life is balanced when I find time for me. Sad but true, you never cut on the kids, etc., but this is the area that usually suffers."

Other folks' responses were quite profound. For example, F.C. replied:

> "As long as one's basic needs/drives are being satisfied, the notion of balance will never enter one's consciousness. Accordingly, only when one has the feeling that something important is missing in one's life, will balance become an issue. Hence, the recognition of balance requires its absence in one's life."

Consider the response from L.C. who wrote:

> "I achieve balance in my life when I am able to fulfill my physical, mental and spiritual needs every day. As a three-legged stool needs all three legs for balance, so do I. Time must be made to allow for all three things or some aspect will suffer."

Overall, most folks seem to operate with a very practical definition of balance. For them, balance is summed up with this response from K.K.:

> "Balance is enjoying life, enjoying work, spending time with family and friends, keeping healthy, playing, maintaining spirituality, and giving back to the community."

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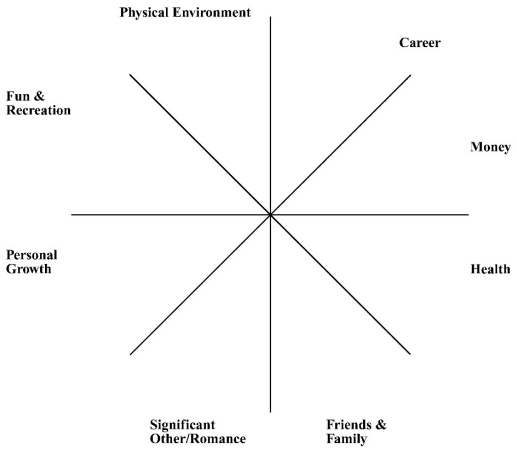
So what is YOUR personal definition of balance? Even if you used the same words as the folks in my quotes, what a balanced life looks like for you will be very different in practice. Just as we're all unique as individuals, our expressions of balance in our lives will be unique.

I use a tool called the "Wheel of Life" with my clients to help them develop their own definition and vision of a balanced life. You may have used this tool before, but take a moment to go through the exercise again. We all need to check in on our lives from time to time to make sure we're on track. Imagine a circle cut into eight wedges, where the pieces represent the following key areas in life: career, money, health, friends and family, significant other, personal growth, fun and recreation, and physical environment. Rate your satisfaction in each area of your life from 1-10. Then draw a line in each wedge to symbolize your score, with one being close to the center and 10 close to the outer edge.

WHEEL OF LIFE



How smooth is the circle you drew? How bumpy is your life? If you scored everything a one, your ride will be very smooth indeed. Unfortunately, you also won't get very far because your wheel won't cover much ground! What would be a 10 for you in each area? No matter where we begin, all the sections of your life are interconnected, just like the wedges on the wheel. It's simply a matter of what you want to focus on first.

So is this the definition of balance? Scoring a perfect "10" in each area of the Wheel of Life? Surprisingly, the answer is NO!

I have learned, through my own life and through working with my clients, that quite the opposite is true! Balance is not some static score on a wheel. In fact, it can only occur while we're in action! It's very much like the quote: "Success is a journey and the destination." Balance is the same way. As long as we're alive, we're moving either toward more alignment with our vision or away from it. The hard truth is that we never truly get there. We can never be "done," because our definition of balance and our vision changes over time as we change!

As you saw from the quotes, the definition of balance and the corresponding vision to be obtained are uniquely personal. For some, a "10" in career satisfaction may very well include working 100 hours a week if they love their job and it satisfies them. For others, a "10" means no more than 40 hours a week or even 20. It's different for each person. The same is true for all the other areas on the wheel as well.

So what's the bottom line? Once you truly know what a 10 looks like in each area for you, you ARE in balance if you're moving toward that vision and out of balance if you're not. Remember that balance is a journey and a destination!

Elene Cafasso is President of Enerpace, Inc., a Coaching firm located in Elmhurst, Ill. As a professionally trained executive and personal coach, Elene works with over-stressed and over-busy professionals who want to attain more balance and clarity in their lives while achieving their highest goals. She creates change for her clients by combining her goal-driven, results-oriented business background with her interpersonal, creative, and intuitive abilities. She offers complimentary coaching sessions to those who are interested in learning what an impact coaching can make in their lives. Elene welcomes your comments and questions. She may be reached at 630-832-4399 or via email: Elene@Enerpace.com.

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